

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 390

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR GR TU

SUBJ: OVERALL GREEK-TURKISH RELATIONS

1. IN THE MEETING EUR/SE DIRECTOR BILL EAGLETON AND I HAD WITH FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS MONDAY NIGHT JANUARY 13, THE LATTER AT ONE POINT ASKED EAGLETON ABOUT HIS ONWARD TRAVEL AND UPON LEARNING THAT HE WAS PROCEEDING TO ANKARA, MADE A FEW COMMENTS ABOUT OVERALL GREEK-TURKISH RELATIONS.

2. BITSIOS SAID THAT THE CARAMANLIS GOVERNMENT WAS VERY CONCERNED AND APPREHENSIVE ABOUT TURKISH INTENTIONS. HE SAID THAT GREECE WANTED GOOD, NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS WITH TURKEY AND WAS COMPLETELY OPEN MINDED ABOUT HOW THIS COULD BE ACHIEVED. HE INDICATED THAT GREECE WOULD NOT EXCLUDE FROM CONSIDERATION ANY MATTER OR QUESTION THAT AFFECTED ITS RELATIONS WITH TURKEY.

3. HOWEVER, HE SAID, HE HAD SEEN NO SIGN OF A CHANGE OF HEART ON THE PART OF THE TURKS. (WE HAD JUST BEEN DISCUSSING THE CYPRUS AND OTHER PROBLEMS, REPORTED SEPARATELY.) HE SAID THE SITUATION COULD GET VERY SERIOUS. IT WAS ALWAYS EASY TO MAKE TROUBLE, BITSIOS WENT ON, AND IT WAS A LOT HARDER TO RE-BUILD FRAGILE AND TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS THAN TO DESTROY THEM. WITH THEIR POPULATION OF 30 MILLIONS, BITSIOS SAID, THE TURKISH
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GOVERNMENT AND LEADERS SURELY MUST HAVE A WHOLE HOST OF

PROBLEMS TO DEAL WITH. CERTAINLY THE CARAMANLIS GOVERNMENT DID. WHY WAS IT THEN, HE ASKED RHETORICALLY, THAT IT HAD BECOME SUCH A MAJOR NATIONAL ISSUE IN TURKEY WHETHER THEY HAD 40 OR 30 OR EVEN 20 PERCENT OF THE ISLAND OF CYPRUS?

4. EAGLETON COMMENTED ON THE CONTINUING CRISIS OF GOVERNMENT IN TURKEY, INDICATING THAT THE CURRENT INTERNAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN TURKEY CERTAINLY CONTRIBUTED IN LARGE PART TO THE OPINIONS AND VIEWS BEING STATED THERE.

5. EAGLETON AND I ALSO REFERRED TO THE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE AEGEAN SEA ATTRIBUTED TO DEFENSE MINISTER AVEROFF LAST WEEK WHICH HAD PROVOKED SUCH A VIGOROUS REACTION IN TURKEY. BITSIOS TURNED TO EAGLETON AND SAID "WHEN YOU GO TO ANKARA, TELL THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO IT." BITSIOS EXPLAINED THAT AVEROFF WAS SIMPLY SPEAKING EXTEMPORANEOUSLY ON THE OCCASION OF THE RETIREMENT OF GREEK ADMIRAL ARAPAKIS. THE RETIRING ADMIRAL HAD MADE WHAT AVEROFF AND OTHERS PRESENT CONSIDERED TO BE SOME RATHER DEFEATIST REMARKS AND AVEROFF THOUGHT HE SHOULD BUCK UP THE MORALE OF THE GROUP WITH HIS OWN STATEMENTS. HOWEVER, BITSIOS WENT ON, GREECE CANNOT BUT HAVE A DEFENSIVE POLICY IN THE AEGEAN AND WITH RESPECT TO TURKEY. HE SAID THE TURKS KNEW THIS WELL AND INDEED ALSO KNEW AVEROFF VERY WELL, THE LATTER BEING PROBABLY THE BEST KNOWN GREEK POLITICIAN IN TURKEY. THEREFORE, BITSIOS THOUGHT THE TURKS SHOULD ATTACH NO IMPORTANCE TO WHAT AVEROFF HAD SAID, GIVEN THE REALITIES OF THE GREEK-TURKISH RELATIONSHIP, THE SETTING FOR THE REMARKS, AND THE NATURE AND LIFE-LONG STANCE OF AVEROFF HIMSELF.
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